



Michigan Supreme Court

Office of Public Information

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CHESTER R. BYRNS, FORMER JUDGE OF BERRIEN COUNTY, IS MOURNED

LANSING, MI, November 16, 2001 – Chester J. Byrns, who served as a judge of Berrien County Circuit Court from 1967 to 1985, passed away early on the morning of November 15. He was 79.

"Judge Byrns was a great judge, and a mentor to many young lawyers," said Paul Maloney, Chief Judge of Berrien County Circuit Court. "He was a model of judicial integrity for us all to emulate."

Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan extended the Supreme Court's sympathies to Byrns' wife, Priscilla, their four children, and six grandchildren.

"Judge Byrns set an example of service to his country and community," Corrigan said. "His death is a sad loss, but his life is an inspiration."

Byrns enlisted as a private in the U.S. Air Force in 1942, remaining on active duty in Europe and the U.S. until 1946. He stayed on the National Reserves, achieving the rank of Major. In 1948, he graduated from the George Washington University School of Government in Washington, D.C.; he received the school's Cowles Award for the highest four-year average. He received his law degree from the University of Michigan Law School in 1951. Byrns also held an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Olivet College.

Byrns' career included not only law, but journalism; he worked as a news reporter in New York City and Washington, D.C. Before becoming a judge, Byrns practiced law for 15 years with the Benton Harbor firm of Butzbaugh, Page and Byrns, of which he was a partner. He was elected to the Berrien County bench three times, in 1966, 1972 and 1978. His professional activities included serving as president of the Berrien County Bar Association. Byrns was also a member of the American Bar Association Committee on Jurisprudence and Law Reform, and was a Director of the ABA's Law Student Program. He wrote a number of legal articles and publications.

Byrns was active in his community, serving as chair of the Berrien County Red Cross, President of the Benton Harbor Kiwanis Club, and General Co-Chairman of the United Fund of the Twin Cities. He was a member of the National Executive Council of the Episcopal Church of the United States.

Visitation was scheduled at the Byrns residence in St. Joseph from 2-4 and 6-8 p.m. today. Funeral Services will be held tomorrow at 10:30 a.m at the First Congregational Church, 2001 Niles Avenue, St. Joseph, Michigan.
